Lewis Nolan Smith as Infant, circa 1872
From the Wells Smith Family Album, page 9, photograph 3

Reflections
Jeffrey Hunt
January 25 2026

This photograph appears on page 9 of the Wells Smith family album. The image measures 2 7/16 inches wide by 3 15/16 inches high, and is third of four images on that page.

The photograph is believed to depict Lewis Smith (born 1871) as an infant. On the same album page, a photograph of his mother, Esther Wells Smith, appears directly above, and a photograph of his father, John Lewis Smith, appears above and to the right. The photograph of John Lewis Smith is identifiable as an early 1870s studio portrait produced in San Francisco, placing the compilation of this album page in the early 1870s.

The photograph to the right (identified as no. 4 on the page) is still under research and may depict John Smith or Lindsey Applegate; identification remains in progress.

Lewis's photograph shares the same decorative border style as his mother's portrait on the page, suggesting the images were likely produced at the same time. Based on the apparent age of the infant and the dating of the surrounding photographs, this image likely dates to circa 1871–1872.

The photograph appears to be an albumen paper print. The slightly heavier feel of the object is consistent with a thin paper photograph affixed to a secondary paper or card support within the album page. The reverse shows a smaller rectangular footprint corresponding to the mounted photograph, along with adhesive residue and age-related staining typical of album construction from this period.

Lewis is notably well-focused, with eyes open and a steady gaze. By the early 1870s, studio exposure times for albumen prints had shortened significantly, allowing photographers to capture infants with relatively brief exposures, often with unseen support. The clarity of the image is consistent with professional studio practice of the period.

Lewis Nolan Smith as Infant, circa 1872
Lewis later in Life. 1871-1831

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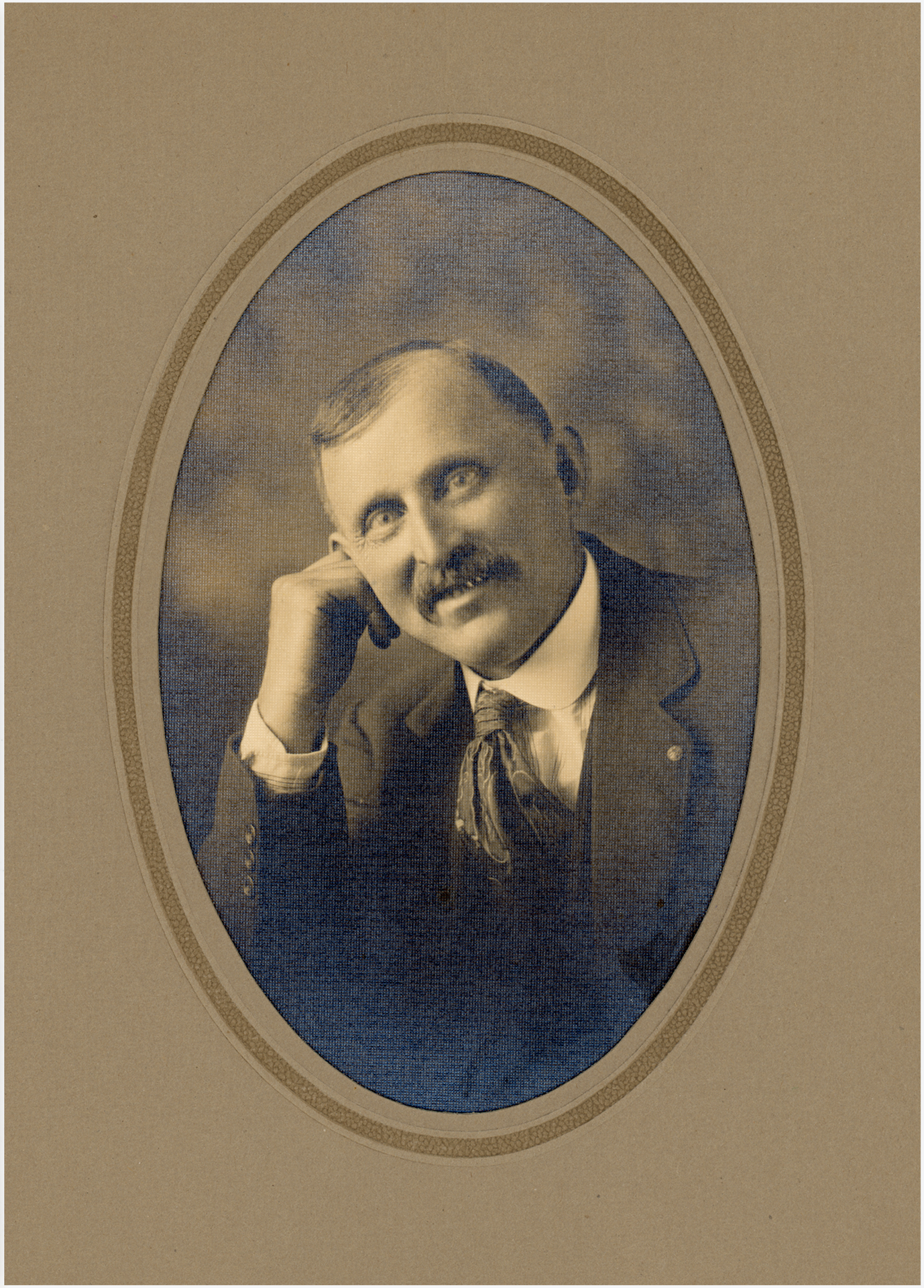
Lewis Nolan Smith (1871–1931), my great-grandmother Bertha's oldest brother, appears repeatedly throughout the archive—sometimes young, sometimes older—always present. He never married, which may help explain how these photographs stayed together and eventually found their way to me.

The infant photograph comes from page 9 of the Wells Smith Family Album, where parents and child are grouped with quiet intention. The timing aligns closely. Lewis was born in 1871, and the photograph dates to the early 1870s. The infant appears beneath his mother, Esther Wells Smith, and near his father, John Lewis Smith. Too many small details point in the same direction to ignore.

Most likely, this is Lewis Nolan Smith as a baby.

The photograph is a flat albumen print, mounted directly into the album page. It is small, carefully placed, and well preserved. The child's gaze is steady and alert, caught in a brief, attentive moment. The image matches the exact border and style of his mother's portrait above, suggesting it was taken at the same sitting and now rests beside it on this shared album page.

The second photo is Lewis of course, a number of years later.



Esther Wells Smith c 1870

John Lewis Smith c 1870

Lewis Nolan Smith, infant, c 1871

John Lewis Smith copy c 1870
Original photograph likely late 1860s